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creator connect

new research on how creators shape what australians discover, trust and buy

ABOUT THIS REPORT

what this report draws on

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Commerce and Discovery Report 2026

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The Creator Signal

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Creator Economy Ad Spend & Strategy

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US 2026 Outlook Study

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CHAPTER 01

creators in the path to purchase

how creators fit into the way Australians discover, research and compare before they buy

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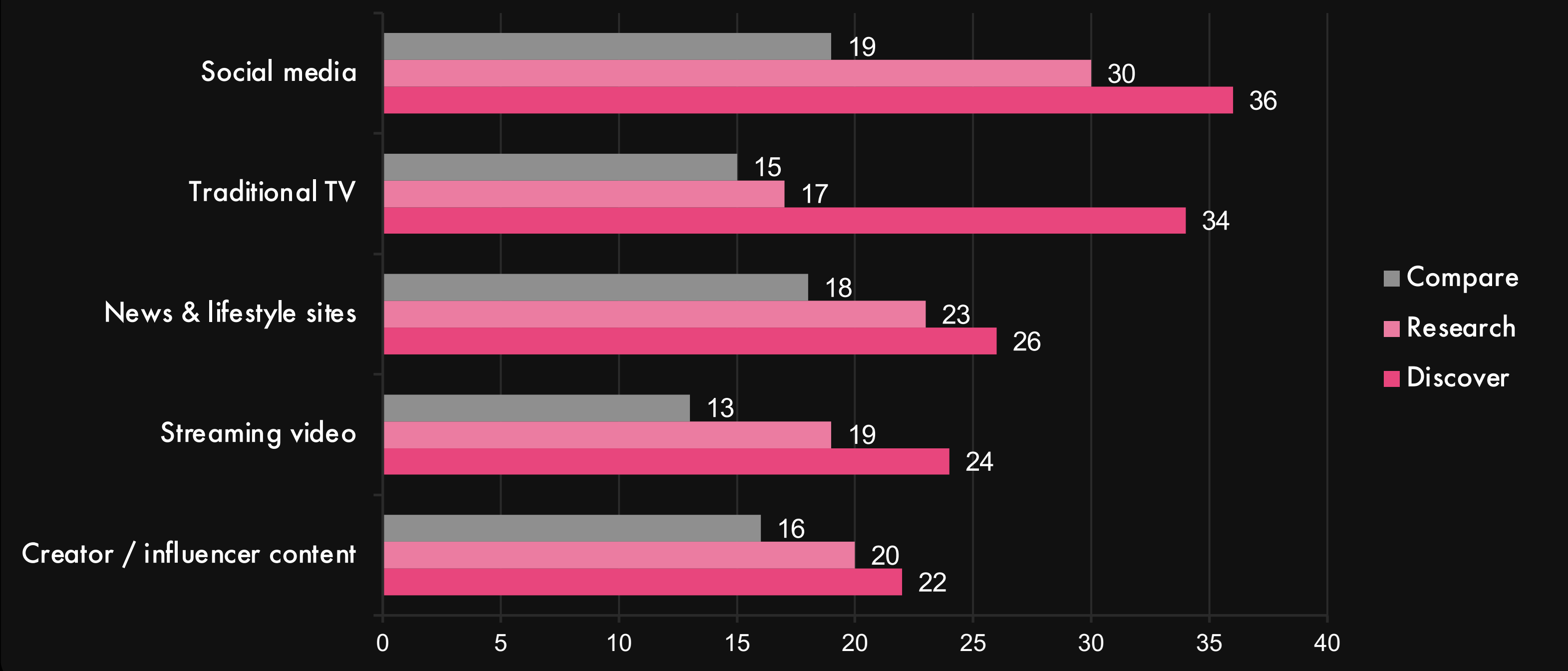
where creators sit in the shopping journey

92% of Australians use search or an online store somewhere in their discovery, research or comparison journey, so those remain the default channels. Creator content plays a smaller, but real, role at every stage, weighted toward the earlier stages.

% of AU online shoppers using each media and content source to discover / research / compare



48%

of AU online shoppers use creator or influencer content at some point in their journey.

Rises to 72% among 18–39s.

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Source: IAB Australia & Pureprofile Commerce & Discovery Report 2026, Australia base: n=1,079 online shoppers aged 18-70

creator discovery in australia and new zealand

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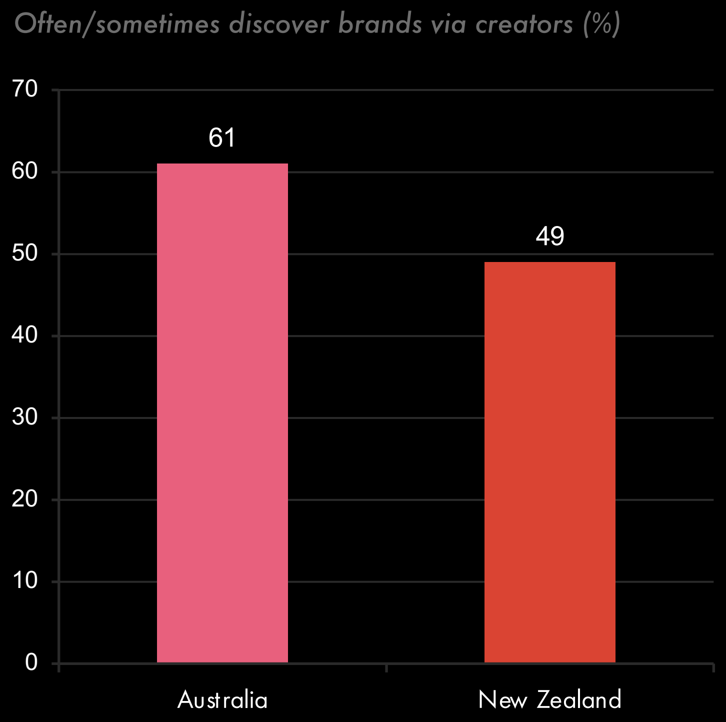
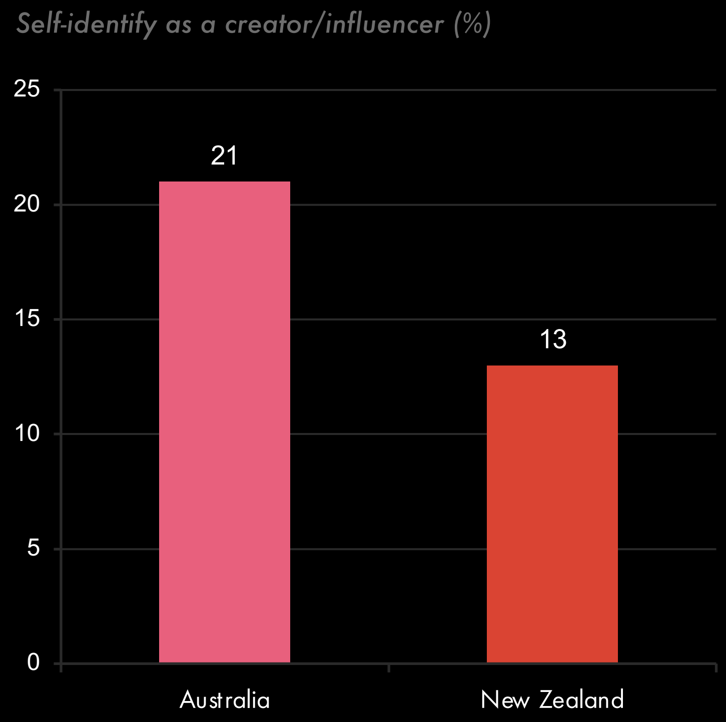
Australia and New Zealand share the same trust hierarchy for creators, but Australians engage more on both sides of the equation: more say they discover brands through creators and more identify as creators themselves.





"The creator economy spans communities to celebrities."

Creators range from local hobby accounts to full-time content businesses. Only a small share earn meaningful income from it.

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Source: *IAB Australia & Pureprofile Commerce & Discovery Report 2026, AU n=1,079 online shoppers aged 18-70, NZ Wave 3 2026, n=877 online shoppers aged 18-70*

creator influence falls sharply with age

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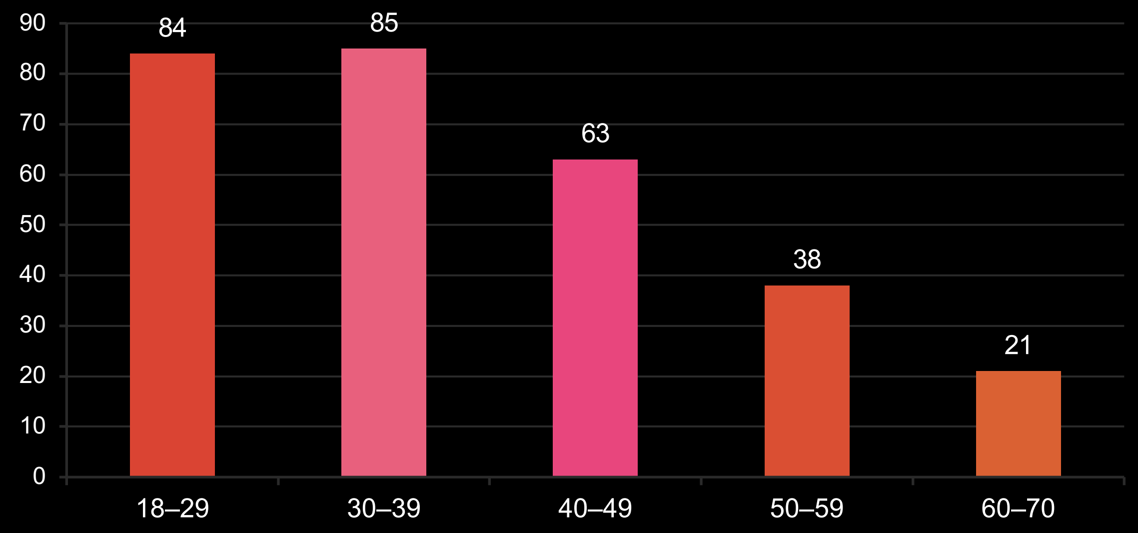
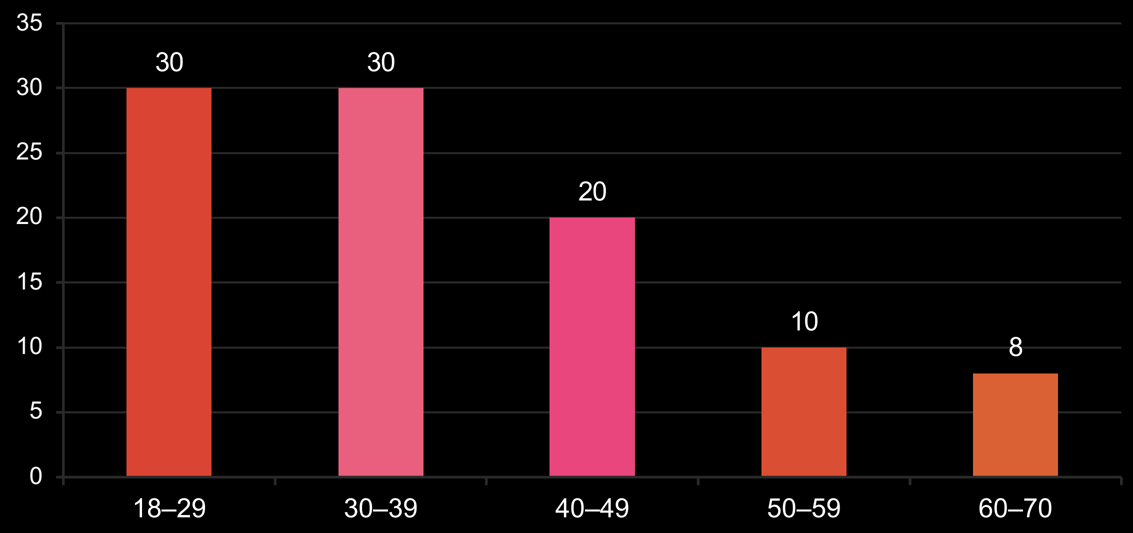
Creator influence in Australia is heavily generational, in both who is watching and who is posting. Discovery via creators is close to universal under 40 and falls away steadily after that.

Often/sometimes discover brands via creators, by age (%)



Self-identify as a content creator / influencer, by age (%)



85% of 18-39’s often or sometimes discover brands via creators

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Source: IAB Australia & Pureprofile Commerce & Discovery Report 2026, Australia base: n=1,079 online shoppers aged 18-70

CHAPTER 02

trust and transparency

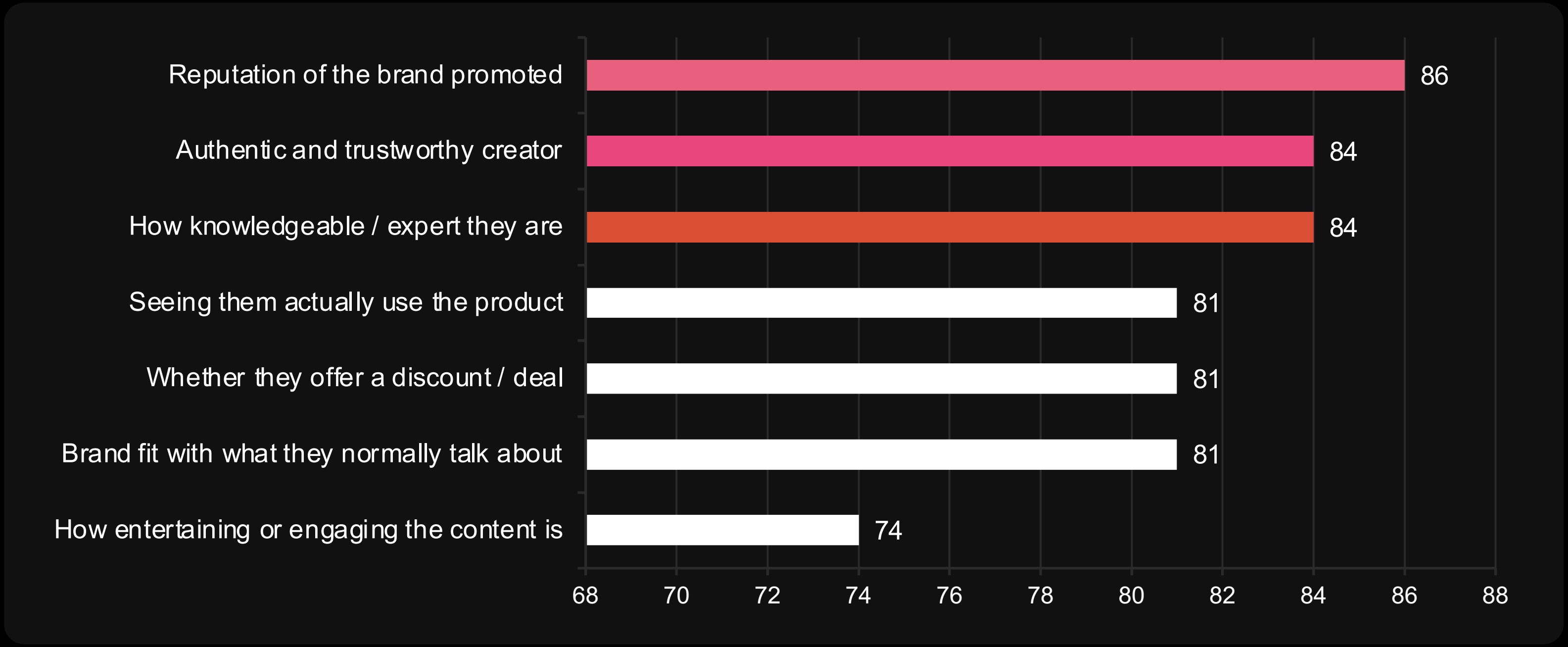
what makes people act on a creator's recommendation, and what makes them hesitate

TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY

what makes australians act on a creator's recommendation

Australians rank how entertaining a creator is last when deciding whether to act on a recommendation, well behind more functional signals like brand fit, expertise and authenticity.

% who say each factor is at least somewhat important, AU



86%

say the reputation of the brand promoted matters most when they act on a creator's recommendation. Globally, audience size ranks last of all trust drivers.

Source: IAB Australia & Pureprofile Commerce & Discovery Report 2026, Australia base: n=1,079 online shoppers aged 18-70

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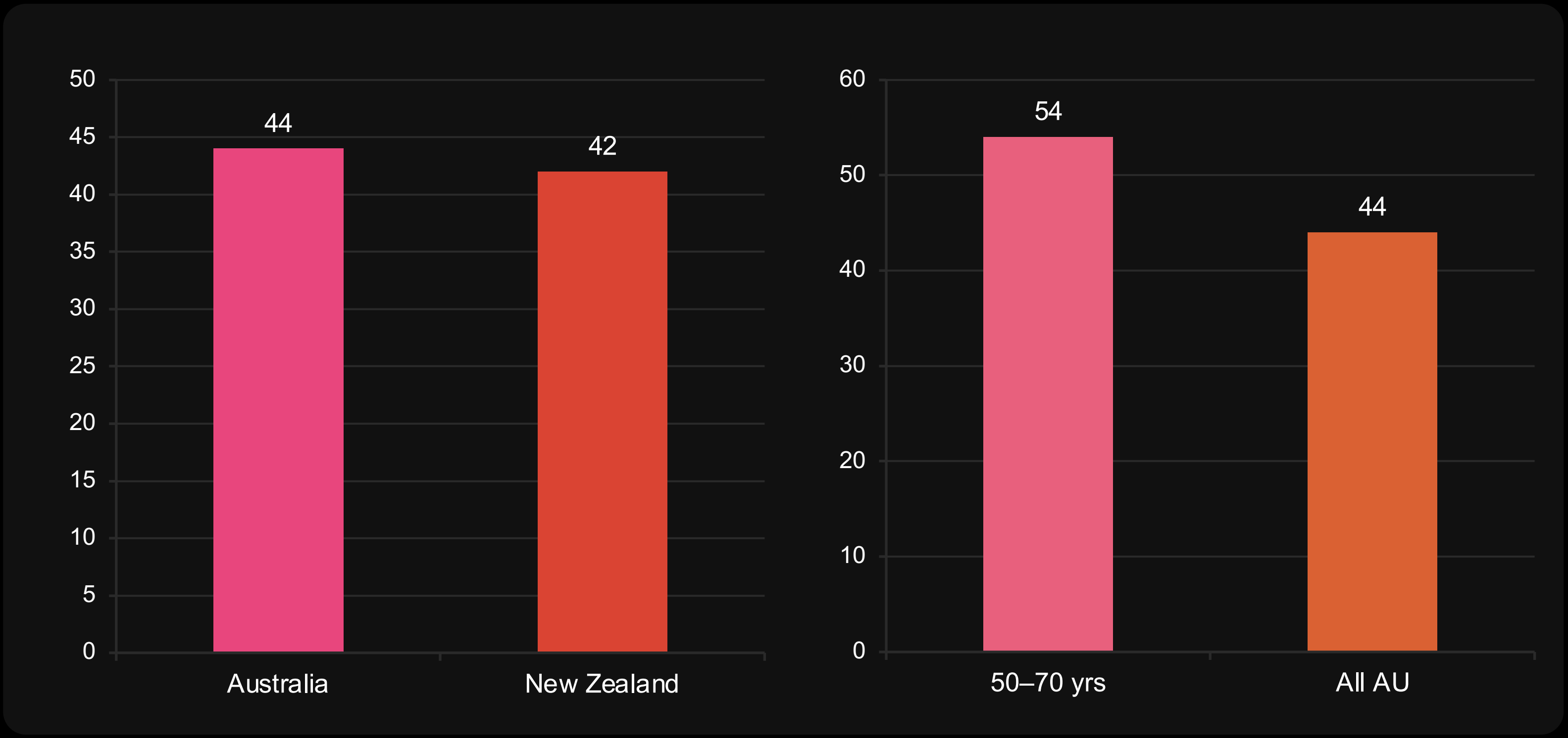
the effect of disclosing a paid partnership

Disclosure softens intent to act, but the effect is modest rather than punishing. Shoppers aged 50 to 70 are considerably more sceptical than the Australian average, pointing to a generational comfort gap.

Less likely to act once a post is known to be paid (%)

AU: age 50–70 vs. overall (%)



+10

AU shoppers aged 50–70 are 10 points more likely than the AU average to be turned off by a disclosed paid partnership (54% vs 44%).

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Source: IAB Australia & Pureprofile Commerce & Discovery Report 2026, Australia base: n=1,079 online shoppers aged 18-70

TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY

trust drivers for creators, across five markets

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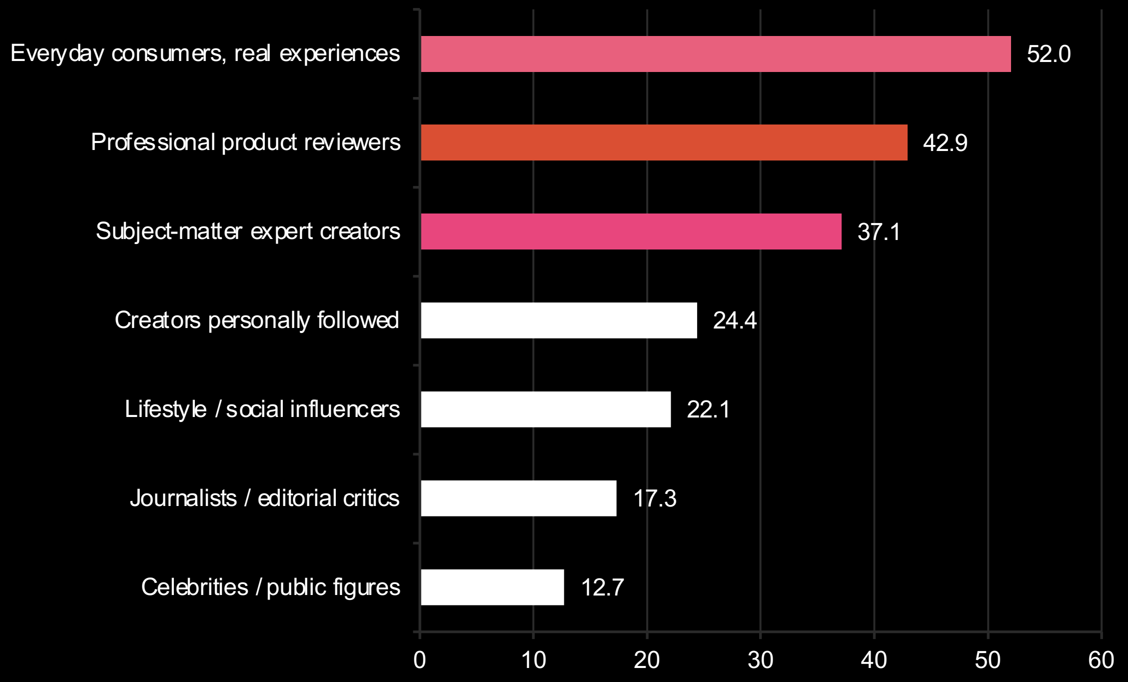
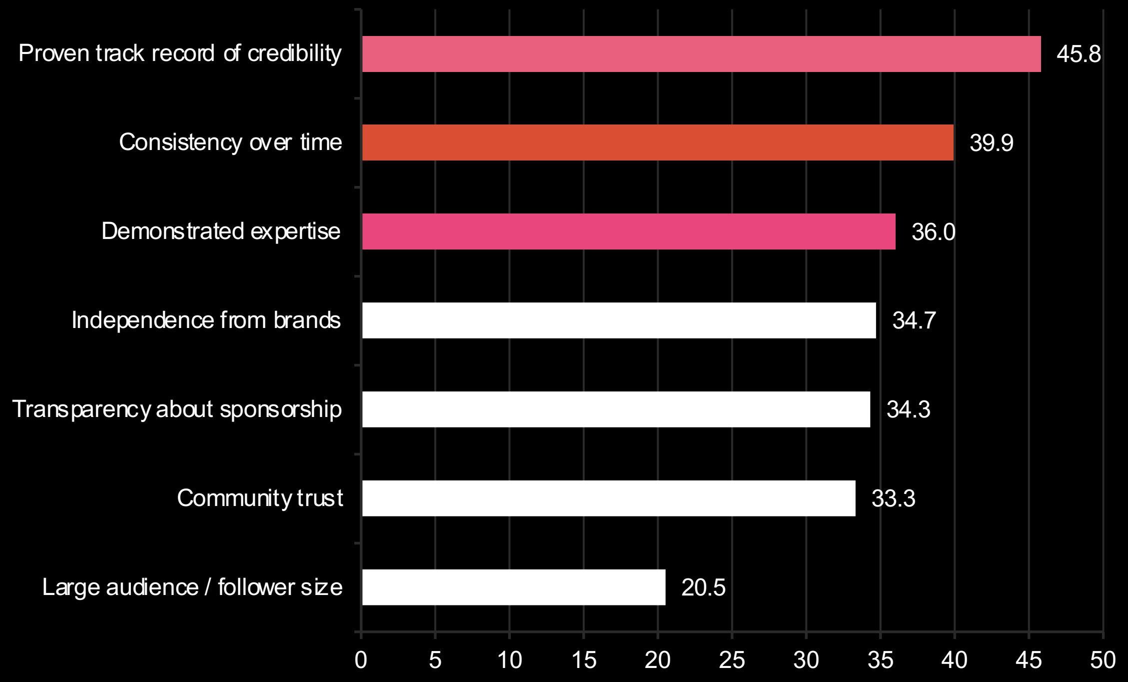
The Creator Signal asked five countries what AI should prioritise when recommending creators, and what actually makes a creator trustworthy. Everyday people rank above public figures in every market.

Preferred creator type for AI to prioritise (%, global)



What makes a creator trustworthy (%, global)



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Source: The Creator Signal, IAB Insights Engine, May 2026. n=2,200 (US n=1,000, UK/AU/India/Mexico n=300 each). Everyday consumers with real experience beat celebrities by 39pt globally (52% vs 13%).

CHAPTER 03

creator content in ai recommendations

How consumers perceive and value the integration of creator perspectives into AI generated shopping recommendations

creators are discovered in AI results and increase confidence.

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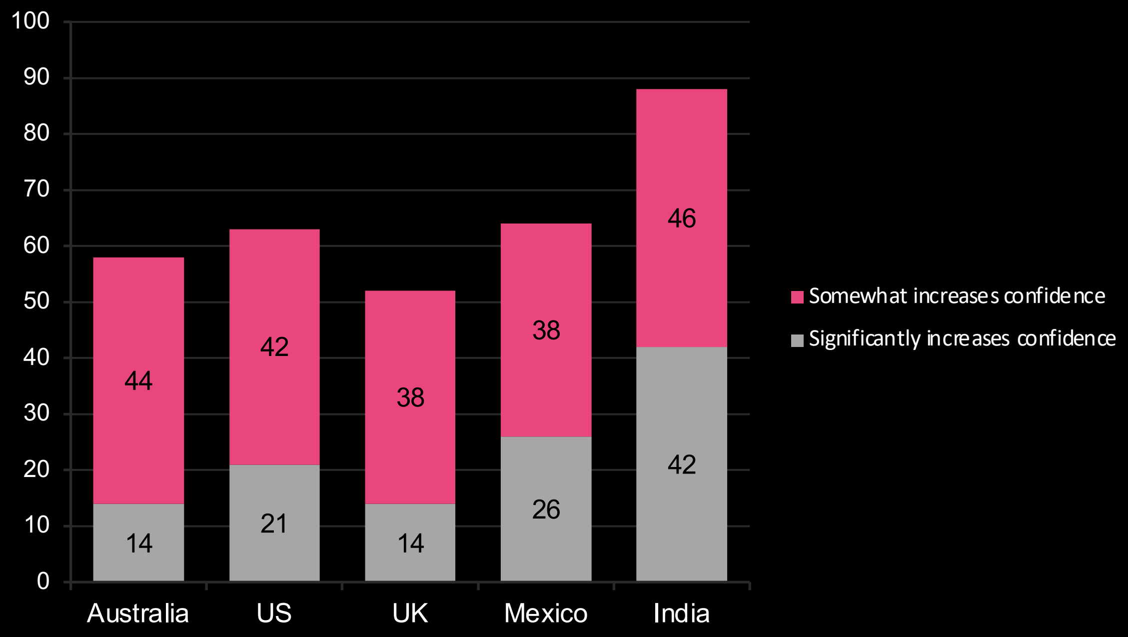
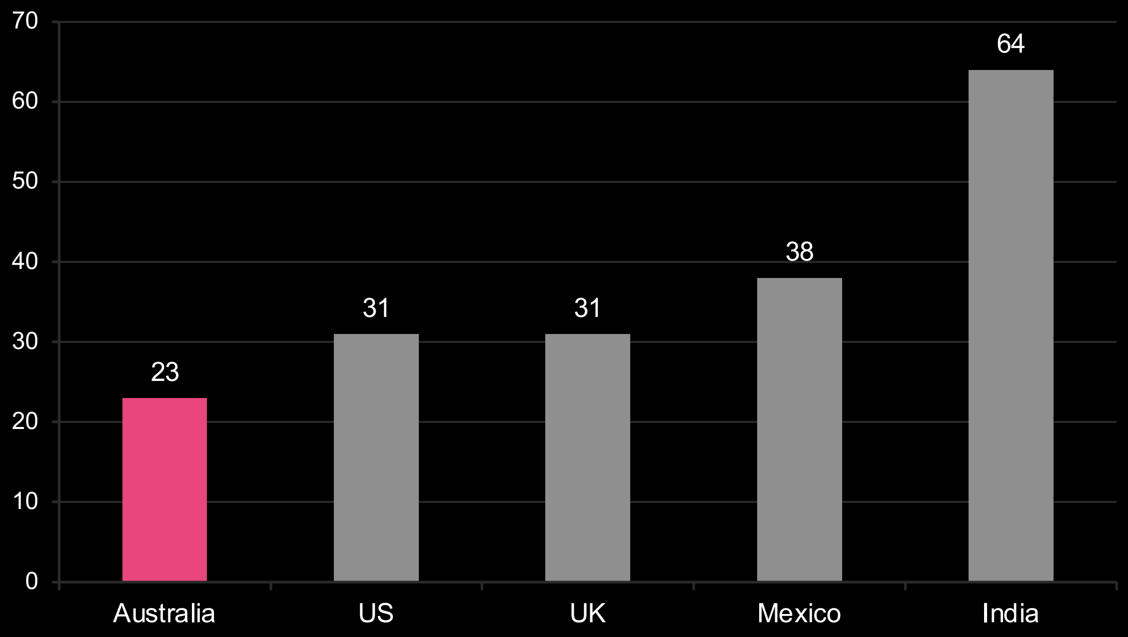
Across global respondents, 36% had discovered a new creator through an AI-generated result they now follow. 64% said a credible-creator-based AI recommendation would boost their confidence.

% increased confidence in AI recommendations based on creator reviews



% discovered a new creator through an AI-generated result



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Source: The Creator Signal, IAB Insights Engine, May 2026. n=2,200 consumers who used any AI tool for shopping research in the last 3 months (US n=1,000, UK/AU/India/Mexico n=300 each)

CREATOR CONTENT IN AI RECOMMENDATIONS

creator reviews as a source for AI recommendations

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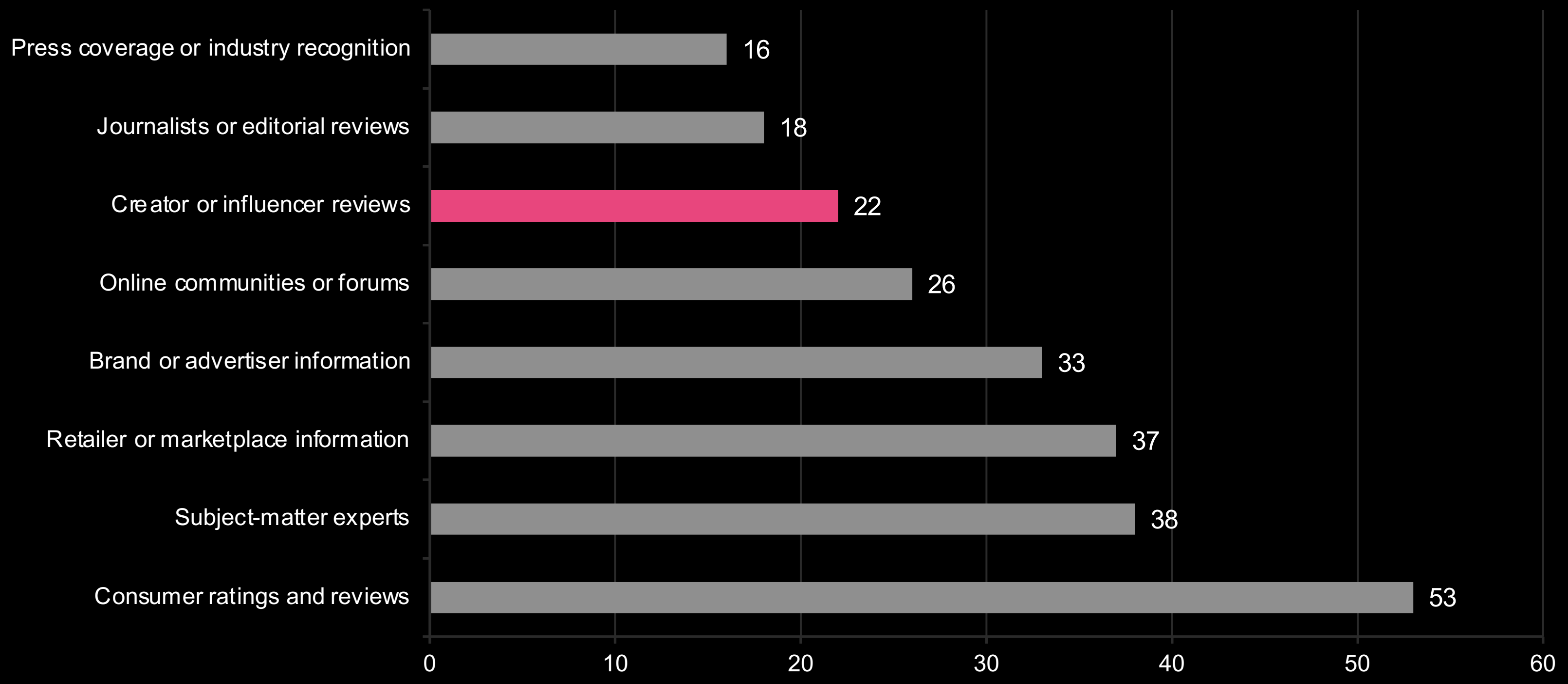
AI tools are becoming an important influence on shopping: 59% of global respondents had used an AI tool (ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Copilot, Perplexity, etc.) for shopping research in the last 3 months. 55% prefer that AI recommendations include creator reviews

AI should rely on when recommending a product (% global)



70%

of global respondents say it's very important that AI clearly explains the sources behind its recommendations.

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Source: The Creator Signal, IAB Insights Engine, May 2026. n=2,200 consumers who used any AI tool for shopping research in the last 3 months (US n=1,000, UK/AU/India/Mexico n=300 each)

creator content most important in AI recommendations for fashion

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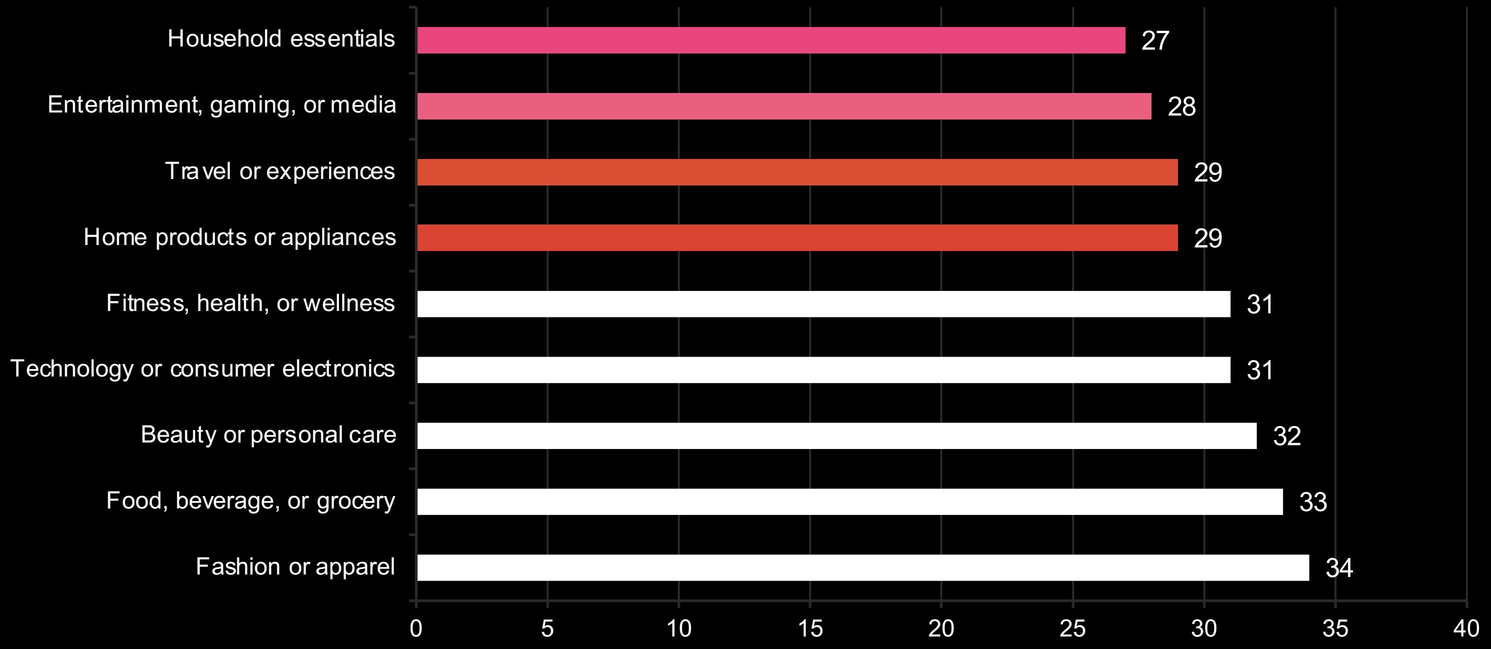
Creator content is more important in AI recommendations for fashion, food and beauty products. Consumers look to creator/influencer content to help find the best price or value when it's included

Categories where creator/influencer content is important in AI recommendations (%, global)



For around a third of respondents who use AI tools for shopping, creator and influencer content is important in the AI recommendations for fashion, food and beauty products.

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Source: The Creator Signal, IAB Insights Engine, May 2026. n=2,200 consumers who used any AI tool for shopping research in the last 3 months (US n=1,000, UK/AU/India/Mexico n=300 each)

CHAPTER 04

investing in creators

A US-only ad-spend data set, included here as a rough guide to where investment could follow the consumer behaviour already covered.

Locally, IAB Australia/PwC ad-revenue data puts Social Video – the paid amplification category creator content sits within – as AU's fastest-growing ad category: 41% of total video spend in the FY26, up from 29.5% a year earlier.

Source: IAB Australia/PwC Internet Advertising Revenue Report, June 2026 quarter — as cited in secondary materials, not independently verified for this report.

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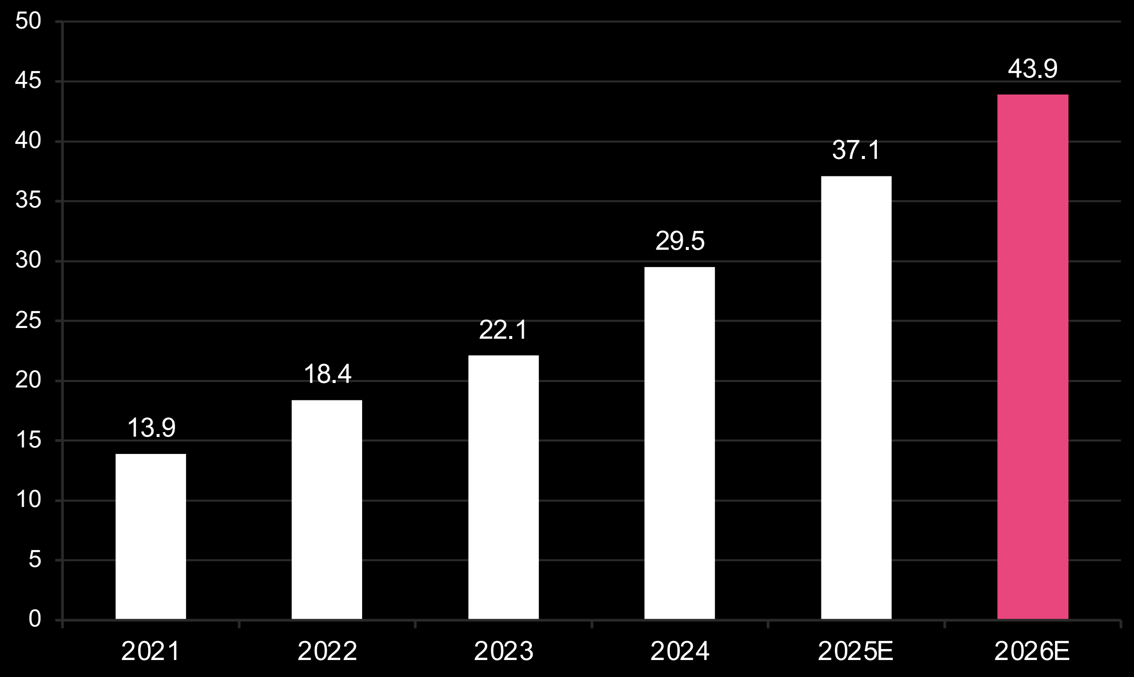
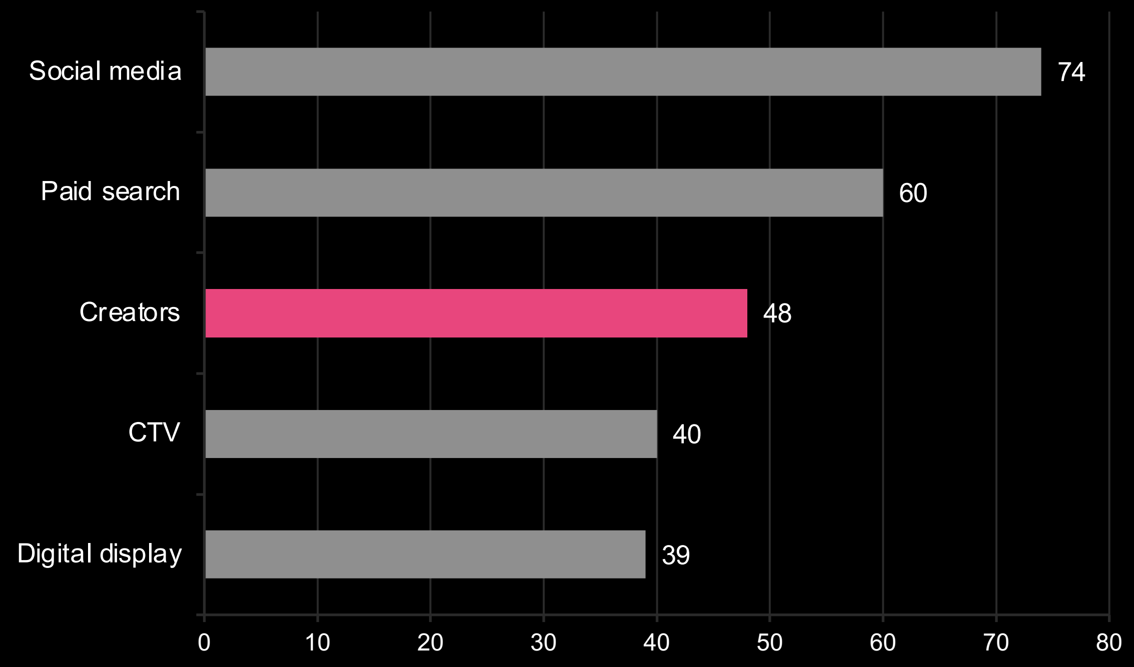
us creator ad spend is accelerating

This section runs on US advertiser data – read it as a guide to where budgets might go, not a description of what's happening here. Spend has more than tripled since 2021 and is forecast to keep climbing through 2026

US creator-economy ad spend, US$B



Channels considered essential, % of US brands



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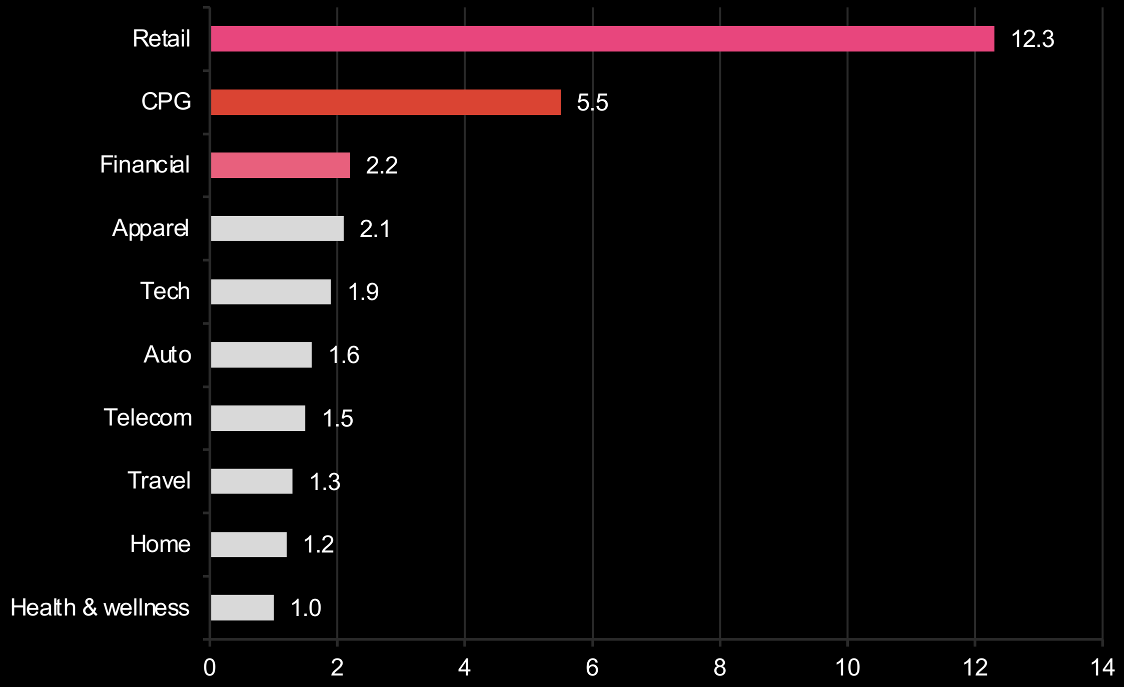
Source: IAB Creator Economy Ad Spend & Strategy Report, IAB & Advertiser Perceptions, US only, 2025. n=453 US ad decision-makers. In the US, creators are a top-3 media priority ahead of CTV, growing ~4x faster than the broader media market (+26% vs +5.7% in 2025).

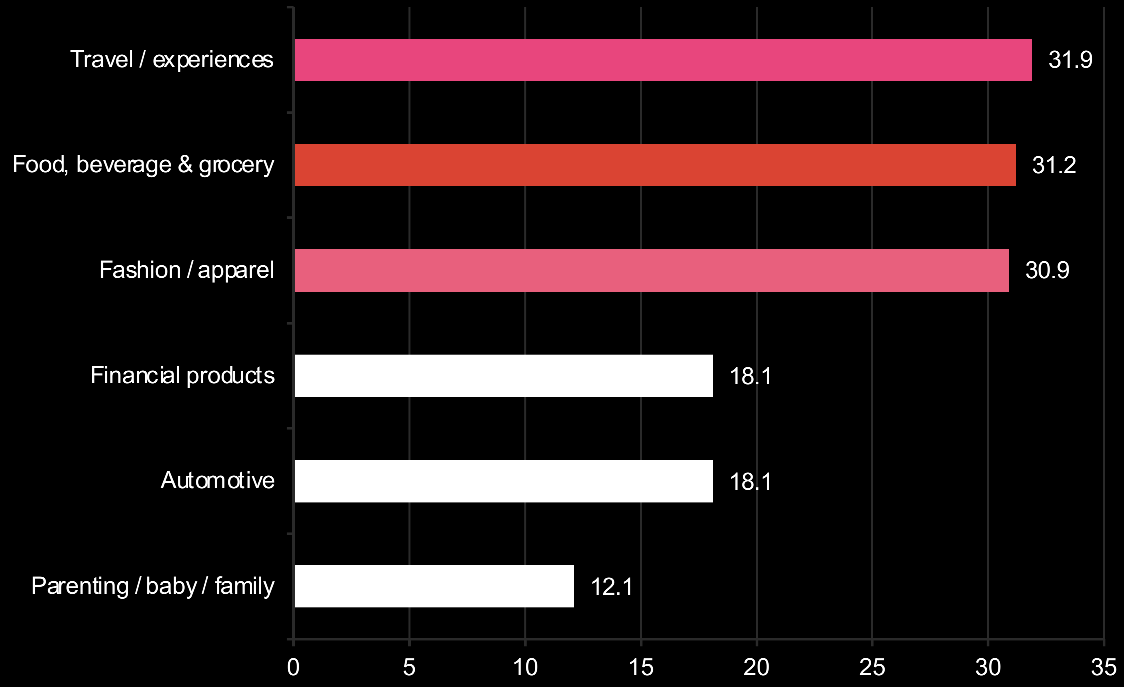
where the us ad money goes, by category

Every US category grew by double digits in 2025, led by retail and CPG. But the biggest US budgets aren't always going to the categories Australians say matter most.

2025E US creator ad spend by category (US$B)



AU: where consumers say creator content matters most (%)



Sources: IAB Creator Economy Ad Spend & Strategy Report, US only, 2025; The Creator Signal, IAB Insights Engine, May 2026. Travel/experiences ranks top for AU relevance (31.9%) yet third-lowest of the ten US ad-spend categories tracked.

creator ads are US buyers' #1 focus for 2026

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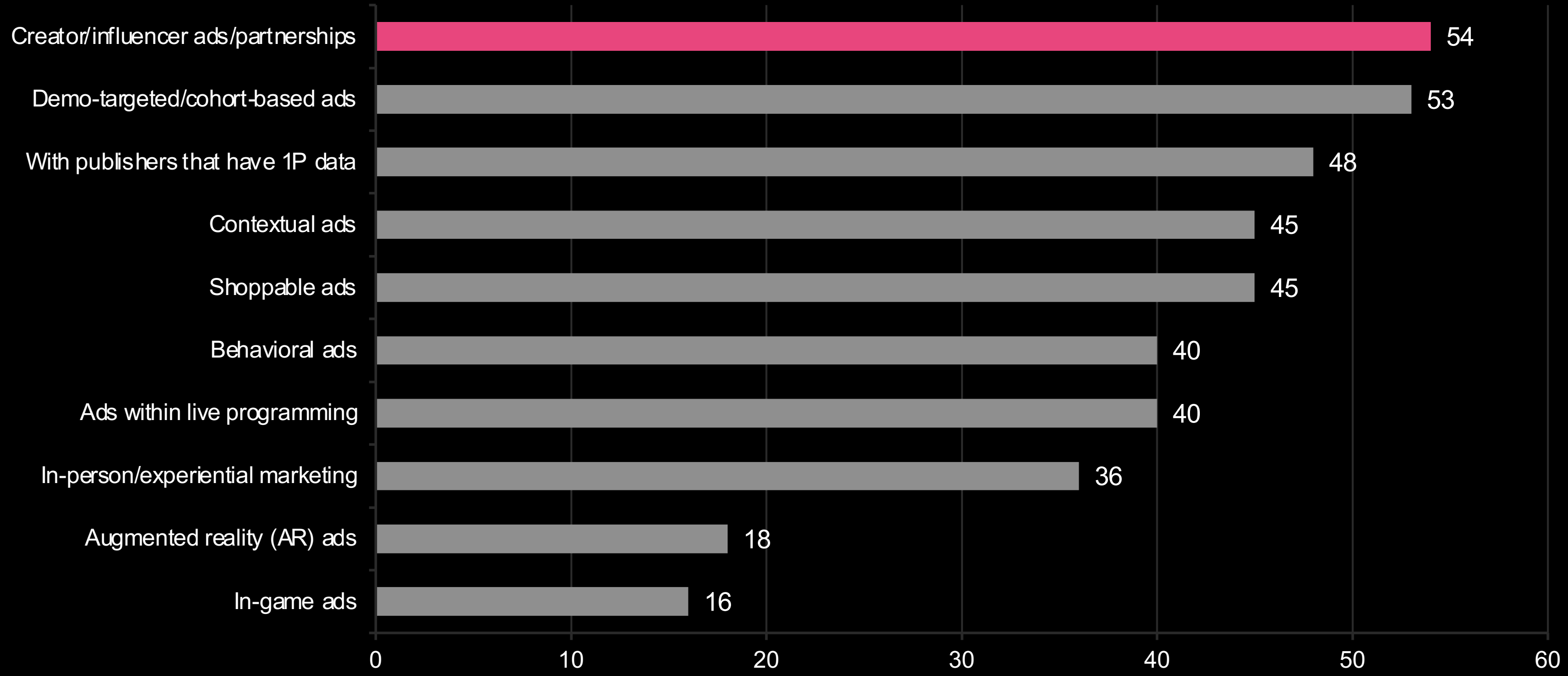
Creator and influencer ads/partnerships rank as the single ad type US buyers most plan to increase focus on in 2026, ahead of cohort-based targeting and publisher first-party data deals, and ahead of contextual, shoppable and behavioural formats.

% of US ad buyers planning increased focus in 2026, by ad type



54%

of US ad decision-makers plan to increase focus on creator/influencer ads and partnerships in 2026, the top-ranked ad type for the second wave running.

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Source: IAB 2026 Outlook Study: September Update. US ad decision-makers, Sep '26 n=211, Jan '26 n=208. Q: Do you expect to FOCUS more, less, or the same amount of time and/or resources in 2026 on the following?

SUMMARY

five numbers that summarise this report

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61%

of AU online shoppers discover brands via creators. Among under-40s, it's 85%.

86%

say brand reputation matters when deciding whether to act on a creator's recommendation.

56%

of global AI-shopping users prefer recommendations that factor in creator reviews.

US$37B

spent on creator marketing in the US in 2025, up 26% year on year.

#1

creator ads are US buyers' #1 focus for 2026. 54% of US ad marketers plan to increase focus on creator ads & partnerships.

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what this means for brands, agencies and media owners

01 For brands

Prioritise authenticity and category fit over follower count. It's the strongest driver of action in every market studied.

Disclose with confidence. A strong brand reputation absorbs most of the trust cost that comes with paid partnerships.

Watch under-40 behaviour closely. It tends to predict where the mainstream goes next.

02 For agencies

Close the measurement gap. Proving ROI is the top challenge advertisers cite, ahead of attribution and reach.

Standardise reporting and payment transparency. Both are named as top-five industry needs.

Culture and country context is important. Creator-AI receptivity varies enormously between AU, US, UK, India and Mexico.

03 For media owners

Package creators alongside social and search. They're already a top-three investment priority, ahead of CTV.

Address trust barriers before pushing shoppable features. Payment security and product-quality doubts are still the biggest obstacles.

Prioritise explainability. AU and UK audiences want to know where a recommendation comes from more than most markets.

in summary

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- Creators already shape discovery for 6 in 10 Australians, and for 8.5 in 10 under-40's
- Authenticity and brand fit outrank reach and entertainment value in every market tested
- Disclosure has a real but manageable cost, and a strong brand can offset most of it
- Australia is more cautious than the US about AI-mediated creator recommendations, which leaves room to build trust through transparency
- Investment is accelerating fast. It's the direction of travel across every market in this report